

PS 261

.W3

Copy 1

Southern Literature;
ITS STATUS AND OUTLOOK.

BY J. B. WARDLAW, JR., A. M.



Southern Literature---Its Status and Outlook.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Ladies' Memorial Association

OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, VIRGINIA,

AT THE

MONTGOMERY WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, JULY 10, 1880,

BY J. B. WARDLAW, JR., A. M.

"THE VOICE OF ANY PEOPLE IS THE SWORD
THAT GUARDS THEM, OR THE SWORD THAT BEATS THEM DOWN."
Tennyson.

PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION.

MACON, GEORGIA :

J. W. BURKE & Co., STATIONERS, PRINTERS AND BINDERS.

1880.

PS261
.W3

124779
16

21

ADDRESS.

WHEN the invitation to address you on this occasion reached me, there were good reasons why, without any unwillingness to serve you, I might have declined. But when I remembered the cause in the interest of which the service was asked, I felt that it was one of which, as a southern man, I could not lightly disobey the summons. For I am one of those who believe that the South of the present owes a binding debt to the South of the past—a debt that can never be ignored as long as courage, love of country and sacrifice of self to duty may be reckoned among a people's virtues. Belonging with all my heart to the new South, and holding by the doctrine that, so far as relates to the conduct of public affairs, our duty is one of forgetting the things that are behind and pressing forward over dead issues to new purposes of national life, yet I do not find it in my duty as an American citizen, still less in my grateful obligations as a southern man, to fail to bear my part in any just tribute to the memory and the motives of them that fell willing and illustrious martyrs on the altar of a cause which, right or wrong in the eyes of others, was to them the cause of country and of civil liberty.

Gladly and in full sympathy, therefore, I join with you in laying the garlands of an undying remembrance on these Confederate graves, here in your mountain-Westminster of which the walls are these everlasting hills, the floor Virginia soil, the dome the blue sky of

heaven, the consecration southern heroism, and the custodians southern women.

But while no one perhaps could be more stirred than I by recalling the spirit of that great struggle which gave these graves to your womanly tendance, nor linger more lovingly amid the memories of our ruined Camelot whose knighthood was broken and scattered, and whose glory and strength departed when the purest and most puissant captain of his age laid down his Excalibur, yet you will pardon me, I trust, when I say that I am not here to tell you in florid iterations that southern soldiers were brave, that southern women were heroic, and that the southern cause was not treason. These things are profoundly true, but merely to restate them in the phrases of oratory would, after all, be no more than to say that courage is brave, virtue noble, love of country patriotic. And especially I am not here to raise a rhetorical battle cry, as has too often been done on occasions like this, and call up ghosts of the past that the logic of events has bidden down. I would utter no sentiment, arouse no feeling in conflict with that wise, catholic and patriotic spirit of amity which in spite of the desperate devices of partizans who seek by every unworthy means to maintain a failing grasp of power, is quietly but surely pervading the public temper of all good citizens of this country. If I should say anything in that way it would be to urge, and in the present attitude of political affairs to urge more hopefully, the duty to which in interest, in honour and in patriotism we are bound, of doing all that lies in us to obliterate sectional animosity, and to speed a cordial and co-op-

erative fellow-citizenship which shall make of these United States a union indeed, not in name only, which self-respecting men of the North and self-respecting men of the South can with truth and with pride regard as their common country.

But the theme that I have chosen lies along another line of thought, and may claim, I trust, enough of interest from you to bear the stress of what I have to say about a subject which, if it do not belong to the Confederacy which is dead, certainly belongs to the South which is living. The theme is Southern Literature, and if in the treatment of it I prove myself less a critic, as is fashionable, than an eulogist and advocate, as is unfashionable, it must be pardoned to an antique veneration of the past, and a sober, but earnest hope of the future. "Something too much" of preface and apology.

The progress of the American people has been swift and broad, but to the thoughtful observer it must needs appear unsymmetrical. For, with whatever patriotic complacency one may regard the amazing strides of this young Atalanta of nations in its century-race with older civilisations, one cannot overlook the unequal character of the development and its inadequacy in certain lines of human endeavour. To be at once specific, the utilities have outgrown the finer things of life. Our machine shops and factories, and labour saving automata are not matched by our art galleries, libraries and universities. The body has out-flourished the soul. American progress early had the lines of development cut out for it by the keen utilitarian max-

ims of Poor Richard, and the supremacy of Franklin's masterful practicality has not yet yielded to the influence of any American Ruskin. And so while Europe is crying mercy of this breath-taking progress, and while we know that the ultra-material extreme is safer, at least for national permanence, than the ultra-spiritual extreme, some of us cannot help wishing for something nearer a golden mean.

Literature is, perhaps, the department in which American genius and effort have realised the least of the possibilities, for culture and the creative faculty have followed but haltingly the swift advance of a mighty material development. The literature that we have is not so much American as Bostonian, at least it is largely of New England and the East. If the cyclopædias and manuals are to be trusted, Boston is the American Mount Helicon. West of the Hudson, your famous author is a *rara avis*, and to publish south of Philadelphia is to have your book fall still-born. The sun rises in the East, and sets in the West; the South is by the way.

It is almost unaccountable that the South, which has furnished a majority of the leading minds that have figured in the history of this country, and which in happier days reached, perhaps, a higher mark of culture and elegant ease than any other section, should have such scanty representation in American letters. Edgar Poe has been quoted as saying with his wonted bitterness that Pinkney's "A Health" would be the finest lyric in our literature but for the circumstance of the author's living south of Mason and Dixon's line. I do not complain in that spirit. As a southern man,

I do not grudge Boston her literary supremacy and prestige, nor envy the speedier recognition of northern writers. Emerson's brave transcendentalisms are as catching beside a Georgia hearth-stone as in Faneuil Hall, and I can feel the fine fire in Whittier's anti-slavery odes as well as in Timrod's trumpet-calls to arms. The prejudices and passions of an evil day cannot make literature a matter of geography. It is above party question. Wisdom is justified of her children; Genius also. It is, then, no part of the present purpose to vindicate under-estimated southern writers nor pray the favour of the great on unlauded songs of the southern muse—time will set that right. The purpose is to consider in some sort the status, the needs, the possibilities of southern literature.

Let us begin at the beginning, by admitting that our southern literature is meagre and insufficient. It embodies, for the most part, neither the finest genius nor the most earnest and deliberate efforts of the southern mind. It is fugitive, occasional, circumstantial. There has been no established class of *literati* among us making a thrifty use of talents, and our greatest minds have looked in other than a literary direction, or at best divided their powers between conflicting labours. We have had hardly any authors who were authors only, who gave their days and nights to literary work as a vocation. Here some busy lawyer turns aside from his dusty briefs to write a minor poem worth the reading; some tired teacher breaks from his dull routine and drops the grammars for a draught of the living Hippocrene; some scholarly man of affairs seeks recreation in a translation;

some facile journalist, letting his pen wanton with a humorous sketch, "cleaves the general ear" with laughter; some ambitious graduate vents his eloquence and first born theories in a sprightly novel, some poet-preacher sets his sermon in fervid verse; some glowing orator transcribes his periods in a book; some fine souled woman sings a tender song; and of such, for the most part, is our literature. And it is not wholly unworthy of us. It is choice of quality, fine of tone, and full of suggestive promise, but we cannot but feel that it is not enough. Something yet higher in pitch, and larger in scope is needed to express the fulness of southern life, to voice the aspirations and noble thought of the southern mind, to immortalise the lofty traditions, the gracious memories and the ancestral glories of southern history. As yet no master mind of the South has addressed itself to a great literary task with that diligent devotion and effectual inspiration which alone produce literature of the highest sort. There is no more jealous mistress than Art. Our southern writers have wooed her too carelessly to win her highest favour. There has been, for our literature at least, an almost fatal division of power. The story is still told of a former United States Senator* from Georgia, that he made a political speech, argued a case in court and preached a sermon the same day—brilliant versatility that, to be sure, but it is not in that way the mind works out its best. It is honorable, indeed, to our people that they seem always to have had the true cosmopolitanspirit of that fine saying of Terence:

"I am a man, and all things human touch me."

* Walter T. Colquitt.

But in too many instances our best minds have touched too many things, and while they have "touched nothing that they did not adorn," the ultimate effect has been a dissipation of power.

This distinctively southern characteristic has been eminently serviceable in one way. It has served to create large views of life, and to keep the general mind sane, catholic and human to the core. Thus you find no more liberal man than the representative Southerner. True he holds his traditions and "manner-born" customs with something of an English tenacity, but his mind is always broad enough, and his heart always right enough to be reached by worthy appeals. And this is the result of our "large discourse," the interest felt and the actual taking part in everything by everybody. Few men are great specialists, but every man knows affairs. Scholar, merchant, statesman, farmer, lawyer and preacher, can on occasion exchange work—the multitude abounds with men. This largeness of life descends to us from the ante-bellum time, and is one of its best bequests.

That old ante-bellum life was a unique thing, one of the finest phases of life, worth living and worthily lived, of which we have record. We shall presently come to consider it as material for a literature to come, but the question is at least interesting, why did it not produce a literature of its own during the palmy days of its existence? Certainly there were present two conditions commonly considered of the first importance to literary work, namely, culture and leisure. The culture was not of that hyper-refined kind which shades off into dilettanteism, and which is fatal to cre-

ation, but large, generous and assimilative, not special and critical. Gentlemen read the classics not to trace the marvellous flexibility of the subjunctive mood, but for the thoughts and beauties of Cicero, of Seneca, of Terence, of Homer, of Æschylus, and of Pindar. And with that thought, and the best thought of the world, southern culture was easily familiar. Columbia, Richmond, Charleston, Savannah and New Orleans had an Athenian society. The South over, luxury, refinement, noble manners and culture met you on every hand. And the leisure was not an effeminate inertia. Certain persons of easy veracity and prolific pens, who have "done" the South in a few weeks or months and turned the dangerous journey to account by a sensational and salable sketch of the country and people they saw, have delighted to picture the old southern gentleman as resting in the intervals between slave-whipping, whisky-drinking and other forms of dissipation in a sort of hammock-swung ennui, sipping mint juleps and fanned by Cuffee and Sambo, vis-a-vis, the very apotheosis of laziness. But people whose position and character have enabled them to keep good company in the South, smile contemptuously at the vulgar ignorance and cheap mendacity of the picture. The old southern gentleman and gentlewoman were lord and lady after a fashion all too rare in this world, and intellectual and social life, never among any people in any time, reached a higher level than among the *noblesse* of the South during the first half of this century. The time had its obvious faults, and there were weak points in the constitution of that old society that could not stand before the avatar of modern progress.

Nevertheless it was a life full of power, and of that kind of power which we should expect to find venting itself in literary expression. But we look in vain for any great and lasting literary product of the southern mind in that time. A fine minor poem, a choice fragment, a pleasant bit of travel, a clever sketch, a brilliant essay, an eloquent oration, we find here and there, but few by the same hand, all temporary in form and written, as it seems, for the nonce. We find no master-work of large purpose and satisfying fulness, catching and carrying the current of that mighty life. There is a reason for this somewhere. Perhaps the plenitude, the fine reality, the sweet certainty of life banished the spiritual hunger that sets its Barmecide feast with the ambrosial richness of ideality. They may have felt—these brave ancestors of ours—that poetry could pitch life no higher, and song could sing it no sweeter than it was, and so have been content to live it and let who would write it. The noble simplicity and outright happiness of their time was not invaded by the torturing questions that a prurient and self-conscious materialism is asking ours. They did not mistrust life, nor tease their souls with a morbid introspection. They rejoiced in a robust realism. And so they may have felt little need to put the joy and glory of living into books.

But perhaps a more practical reason for the dearth of literature of their own making among them, is found in the general cast and tendency of the Southern mind. Its activity ran after affairs. It loved questions at issue. Contest was its delight. It was argumentative rather than speculative. And this mental predi-

lection found its field of exploit in the twin sciences, Politics and Jurisprudence. Schoolboys discussed the political questions of the day, and were Whigs or Democrats. Politics was the science of sciences, the art of arts, the absorbing popular study, and it drew to itself the strongest minds and the best genius. Every hotel corridor was an open lyceum, every fireside an embryonic school of state-craft, every dinner party a meeting of political scientists. High questions of State were discussed in company as art and philosophy and the like topics were discussed in other circles. Thus all, or nearly all, the best thought went into forensic forms. The spoken oration and the political debate were the great methods of expression, and in them were poured out many an unwritten page of fine philosophy, of parliamentary wisdom, of classic eloquence, of genuine poetry. The energy of thought was so large that men were reckless of its conservation. The earth was irrigated with wine, and only here and there a vesselful was caught up to show the flavour of the vintage. Men whose uttered wisdom and eloquence might have shone on lasting pages are remembered only as prominent figures in political history, as Milton himself, if he had not been brought as much by circumstances as by deliberate desire into the rapt seclusion of the scholar and bard, would be remembered now only as a secretary of State and a vigorous pamphleteer, instead of the mightiest master but one of the English tongue.

Our literature, then, as we have seen, is inadequate, short of the needs and the inspirations of our people. Interesting as it might prove to trace further the

rational causes of this, it is more pertinent to our purpose to press another and more important inquiry. What is the present outlook? Are we growing, can we grow, from the precious seed planted by our great and worthy ancestors, a literature that shall at length be garnered in immortal sheaves? I, for one, believe that we can, that the seed, the soil, and the season, all conspire to produce a noble harvest. The time is ripe for the growth of our southern literature, and large results await the willing and capable pen. I know this is sailing against the wind of current belief, or rather, disbelief. A modern school of thought that is dinning its analytical criticism of everything into ears willing and unwilling has declared against any further literary creation, as, indeed, it has declared against almost everything worth living for and believing in. The human race, it would have us believe, is parting with its virility, with its old faiths, its hopes and its inspirations, with its purest power. We of the present and they of the future are to be critics, not creators, agnostics, not believers, passive thinkers, not active doers. We are entering upon an Alexandrian period of refined and keen-eyed criticism, indeed, but of feeble production. Our learned time may produce a Theocritus, but never more a Sophocles, a Gray possibly, but hardly another Burns.

But this pessimistic creed some of us have not yet learned to adopt, and still believe in the possibility of doing something. For such a narrow reading of the signs of the times will not hold good against the possibilities and the power of human nature, which still refuses to have limitations prescribed it. No great

work was ever done, no great genius ever appeared but amazed men with a fresh power. Every true poet has been the last with the critics till another has come, and, after him, another.

True, this time of ours is a hard one for the man of inspirations and large hopes. Culture has it over creation; fact over truth. But the skeptical, critical cast of modern thought is merely a shell, inside which a vast positive energy is working, and which it will presently burst. Reaction is as sequent on action in thought as in physics. Old Carlyle, with all his splendid inconsistencies, is right about one thing: power will assert itself, and a great man will be great, whatever the wind and weather of circumstances. Doubtless the greatest mind is hindered or helped, limited or enlarged in scope by surrounding conditions. But the true light will burn through the bushel, and pure power will find or fight its way to results.

All literature has not been written. "The divine creative energy" is neither dead nor dying. I like the valorous optimism, transcendental as it is, of Emerson's saying, that perhaps Homer and Milton will be tin pans yet. Why should the mighty past paralyse us? Let us have the courage of our destiny.

"The seeds of godlike power are in us still."

What is literature? Is it a thing that once done is done forever? Have there been no epics since Homer reared the proud and enduring structure of the Iliad? Did Shakspeare's matchless dramas end all dramatic work? Are there no songs but Burns's? Has Wordsworth fully and finally interpreted nature? Have

Fielding, Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, Dickens and George Eliot exhausted, or merely opened up the world of fiction? Have Demosthenes and Burke left nothing to say in political philosophy? If it is all done, and there is nothing left us but criticism and appropriation, we may as well fold our hands, shut our books, and sit down with the moribund pessimists, leaving this brave world, our grand ancestral estate, to worthier and more puissant heirs.

But happily we know that literature, like every other great enterprise of the human mind, is not a finished work, but a living growth to which every age and every people must, according to their several ability, and on pain of missing life's best, add something. Thus there is an ancient, a mediæval, a modern literature; a Persian, a Greek, a German, an English literature. And the literary emergency comes to every worthy people. A people's literature is its attempt to solve by its best minds its own highest problems, and to utter by its best voices its purest inspirations. And to every nation, as to every individual, there is a different point of view. The problems and the inspirations are the same in general outline, but new conditions give an infinite variety, and make creation always possible. The great mystery of life puts its question to every man and to every people afresh. Now and always remain these high interrogatories of the soul: God? Man? Nature? And we must answer for ourselves. For me, as an individual soul, what Moses or Plato or Wordsworth has spoken cannot wholly suffice. For us as a peculiar people, what Hindoo or Hebrew, Greek or Englishman has spoken cannot suffice. We

ourselves must think and speak on these things. All literature has not been written, then, any more than all life has been lived.

But the general proposition that literature is still possible, must have a special application to us before our case is made out. Let us see if it has any promise for us, and if any, what?

Every literature, we shall find it useful to remember, has a basis in national feeling, has a soil to grow in, as surely as the products of the earth. In these days when books called literature spring like mushrooms out of every trash-heap, we are too apt to forget the conditions of healthy literary growth. No literature, however large the genius that speaks through it, can be cosmopolitan and general in its origin and development, but must have its beginnings and growth in special soil, of which it will always bear the flavour. And a national feeling has been the most fruitful soil in which literature has yet grown. Greek literature is one thing, English literature is another, and southern literature, we may at least hope, is going to be another. If we read Pindar understandingly, we must in so far become Greek, if Goethe, German. Even the greatest masters that we are wont to think of as above the common voices and belonging to all time: Homer, Dante, Shakspeare, are not wholly cosmopolitan. One is Greek and ancient, one is Italian and mediæval, and one is English and modern. Thus all great thought has at once a peculiar and a universal, a national and an international side.

Any literature, therefore, that may be produced in the South, cannot be a mere extension of English lit-

erature. It will be either a southern literature or no literature at all, but the passing echoes of a day.

An analysis of southern thought and character will show that we are a peculiar people with a unity of feeling as strong as any national or caste feeling. The word Southerner, carries with it as distinctive traits and characteristics as the word Frenchman, or German. Born of a stock that planted itself with like vigour and purity no where else out of its island home, bred under separate and unique conditions, we are by birth, by rearing, by growth, as well as by climatic and other physical influences, a peculiar people. And all this has taken shape in a strong and coherent southern feeling. Take, by way of illustration, our civil war. The southern states were as one, and the same spirit prevailed everywhere from Maryland to Florida. Never was there exhibited a deeper and more genuine national feeling; and it was not the outgrowth of a mere confederation of states on a basis of common interest, nor was it produced by the personal magnetism of great leaders. The confederation of the states, and the universal rush to arms with the same purpose and spirit were the results, the phenomena of a deep-rooted and wide-spread organic southern unity. The war was a manifestation of it only, not its origin; it existed as strongly before as during the war, and the "Solid South" of contemporaneous politics—the solidarity of southern political sentiment and action in the interest of a just and wholesome home rule—is another phase of the same thing. But this southern feeling is not merely hereditary tradition, not merely confederate feeling, not merely the product of the reconstruction

era. It is something broader than these, it is an ethnic passion, a community of life and of thought that no mere political or other coalition could effect, forming the southern States into a union within the Union.

Taking, then, our southern national feeling as a thought-soil, what growth may be expected? It chances to open to us a field of literature both in the past and in the future. Backward our traditions bind us to the old southern civilisation, which ought to prove an almost inexhaustible store of treasure. Already it looms behind us as our heroic past, and the sharp shock that divided it from our present life makes it seem now as distant across a chasm of two decades as if it were across a chasm of two centuries. The range is long enough for literary perspective, and the genius of that old southern life, as it touches and holds us by its traditions and memories, and is still an integral part of our life, is just such matter as the fine hand of faithful and loving appreciation may in this changed aftertime shape into an enduring literature.

How now does that heroic age affect us? Not mournfully, for it were unphilosophic, if not unmanly, to bewail the passing of that broad-acred system of life. In the development of our people such a change was necessary to a fuller growth. The passing of that old order was a destruction wrought not by sword and politics alone. It was a necessary step of the "Time-spirit," that invisible divinity which moves with majestic gait through the ages, demolishing proud structures only to build in their place prouder. Or better, God was the destroyer who in the path of his destructions

ever upbuildeth. For in the midst of death we are also in life.

But how can we best preserve to our life as a people the noble things bequeathed to us from that perished past? How may we so infuse the large and lofty spirit of that ancestral life into our present life as to retain all its good? How, we may ask, have other peoples carried across revolutions the spirit of their ancestors, and transmitted it to posterity? By shaping it into a literature. Every nation that has had an heroic age has built a literature on its traditions, and no nation has a literature of any worth except those that have had an heroic age.

Every circumstance attending the change from the old South to the new, makes the old a fit subject for literary art. Consider, for example, how differently a like change has been wrought among us and among the English. Practically the battle has been the same in England and in America, Radicalism against Conservatism. But in England the ascendancy of Radicalism has been gained by slow and hard contested steps. The old English nobleman has been gradually merged into a commoner, so gradually, indeed, that there is no pathos in the change. He has but yielded to the slow, grinding logic of events. But the southern nobleman was one day taking his ease in his ancestral halls, feeding his fancy with proud memories and dreaming grandly of the lasting existence of his order. The next day his ancestral portraits were torn from his ruined walls, his household gods destroyed, and he emerged from the blinding smoke and the deafening din of an illstarred strife to find himself only a

proscribed American citizen. His present existence is the greatest fact in modern political history—citizenship of a mighty republic, but his former existence is still the proudest and tenderest of recollections. In this change there is pathos and the “promise and potency” of a noble literature.

Who, then, in prose or in verse, in song or in story, shall catch and fix in forms of beauty and of power the old for the inspiration and growth of the new? Consider the old Southerner, what manner of man he was—lord of his castle and estate, not altogether unlike an Odysseus in his Ithacan kingdom. He was the latest, as he will be the last, fine figure of feudalism. On his estates grew the staple that was king of commerce. For the furnishing of his household needs all climates and civilisations were taxed. And he was a broad man, comprehensiveness was his dominant characteristic. He was broad-acred in lands, broad-hearted in hospitality, broad-minded in thought—a man on a large scale who

“Bore without abuse
The grand old name of gentleman,
Defamed by every charlatan,
And soil’d with all ignoble use.”

And his queenly mate, the southern woman, with a Greek-likeness of beauty, a fineness of culture, a dignity of breeding, a power of purity, a sweetness of heart, a loftiness of soul unsurpassed in history or fiction—who shall picture their splendid eminence for our needy time? The world has given us no such rich material, no such fine figures for literature these many barren years.

And the old slave life, not in its exceptional barbaric phases, but in its peculiar trusting and pathetic temper, in its reciprocal confidences, and in its harmless pride is worthy of lasting remembrance. And remembered it will be by the posterity of both races, when the incendiary fanaticism and abolition pamphlets that did it such unjust violence, are fallen in the muck-heaps of time.

It goes without the saying that no other than a southern hand can work out these things. The fine spirit of the old life eludes in its subtle essence the grasp of a foreign hand. Some southerner must do for the South, what Sir Walter, a Scotchman, did for Scotland, and what he could not have done, if his muse had been born and educated among the fogs of London instead of among the heaths and cliffs and lochs of Scotland. And the old life of the South may yet stand out as fairly in our chronicles of that time as the Scotland of the Waverly novels, which Sir Walter never saw, but *knew*, shines on his immortal pages. Let our "wizard of the South" arise.

Take, too, our war, what noble material it offers a literature; not its political and constitutional questions. They are settled once for all, and the South has accepted the settlement with a thorough and hearty good faith which declines *ex post facto* discussion. But the sublime exhibitions of courageous patriotism, the glad obedience to duty, the Spartan self-sacrifice, the splendid endurance, the stirring vicissitudes, the awful tragedies, the heroic acceptance of defeat that it developed, what themes are these to kin-

dle the times to come with their shining lessons! In that mighty struggle—

“ When the ranks were rolled in vapours, and the winds were laid with sound ”

our southern national feeling manifested its purest and greatest phases, and sealed its devotion with its best blood. And the record is yet to be written. For mighty deeds do not stop to give an account of themselves. Achilles did not chronicle his exploits, and Lee has left us no autobiography. While here and there lyrics that will live burst from surcharged souls, and gave hasty expression to the principles that swayed men like a tempest of the gods, it has been left to us to preserve in enduring forms the memorabilia of that great epoch. Ours it is to hand down to the new South the rich bequests of the old. The question of victory or defeat, of gain or loss of cause, counts for nothing, provided defeat do not mean total destruction of strength. For a greater gain than the victories and conquests of war, and more than compensating for all losses, as a dozen historical parallels will show, is the stronger and surer knitting of the people in a common unity. A strong and virtuous national feeling is worth more than victory, and more than men and wealth, at least for the greatest of all work, the upbuilding of a people's thought, and the ennobling of a people's life.

Backward, then, to these rich fields our national spirit leads for literary growth. But the future points to other and different opportunities. For what are the special characteristics of our southern national feeling? As a people we distinctively have Reverence

and Conservatism. We have a reverence for God, a reverence for Law, a reverence for man and his rights. The voice of the scoffer is little heard, and less regarded throughout our whole land. The disintegrating influences of modern skeptical thought have not yet got at work among us. Isms do not flourish in our soil. Our conservatism refuses to pipe to the mad dance of the times. While the societies of Europe and of even other sections of this country are undermined by rampant forms of communism, our body social remains undisturbed. Our masses do not mutiny against law and established order. Strikes and riots are unknown. And while this cultured generation is elsewhere framing artistic prayers to an "Eternal not ourselves" or asking unanswerable questions of the "Unknowable," everywhere in our land there are earnest men and women reverently thanking God for rain and sunshine, seed-time and harvest, and "into every corner of whose homes shines the light of God by day and by night." Belief is not yet become obsolete or irrational.

Let us look toward religious thought, the basis of all healthful literature, and see what the reverential spirit of our people may lead us to do in that way. In religious thought it is a stormy day the world over—the wide world from which our quiet life seems so far removed. The old landmarks of faith are gone and going. The creeds of Christendom are laughed at by men who rest under no other suspicion of being irrational. The leaders even of christian religious thought are many of them putting on the strange liveries of new gods, and forsaking the paths of the ages for

broader and shorter ones that lead every way, indeed, but nowhither. Faithlessness has made aimlessness of life. An "immense ennui" is settling down on individuals and nations, and earnest and capable men are seriously discussing whether life be worth living. Men plunge mind-length into the whirling centres of modern thought, and lose their heads in the dizzy round, till their eyes darken on the fair earth around them and on the sweet heavens above them, and the cheerless, inclement darkness of doubt closes them about. What does it all mean? Not that men will forsake religion, nor that the mighty religious tendency of the human mind is losing its force. It is only a time of doubt, and many a time of doubt has come in the history of faith, from which men have emerged into a faith yet stronger and clearer. For the religious faculty is imperishable and perennially active. But a time of doubt does always work one great evil, and that is the loss of reverence. As long as a healthful reverence for the beautiful, the good and the true, for God and the manifestations of God in man remain, we are safe, let creeds change as they may. Reverence is the need of our time, and of all times, a reverence that is broader and deeper than any special creed, such a reverence as in one form or another has always been the basis of religious thought and literature. Now while this religious revolution is working, some land, some people must stand out as a light, must bear the ark of the covenant, and it will be that people in whom abides the deepest and most intelligent reverence. Even in these two thousand years, the home of the leading religious idea of the world has changed often,

and always to that land and people which had the most healthful spirit of reverence. First it was Judea, then Rome, then Germany, then Scotland, then England, and why not now our South? In every land but ours good and wise men are mourning the decay of reverence, of the religious spirit. With us it is still earnest and strong. It is a dazzling thought, but why is not heaven and the divine source of saving truth as near us as it was to Luther, to Knox or to Wesley? Why may not the voice crying the ways of the Lord in a modern wilderness of unbelief come from among us? Why may not faith find her surest stronghold in our land? The chance surely is as much ours as any other people's. Let our religious thinkers look to it. We have as yet done but little toward building up indigenous religious thought; we have hitherto adapted foreign helps to our needs. But now is our opportunity to assert our religious individuality and power, to utter convictions and thoughts for the healing of the nations, to breathe upon the dry bones of controversial theology, and pour oil upon the troubled *mare magnum* of skeptical science.

And if the reverential spirit of our southern feeling gives us a chance to build a native literature, not less beneficent in another direction is southern conservatism. In political thought and governmental policy it must hold a strong and eminently serviceable hand. Many sagacious students of our national politics see in southern conservatism the surest balancing power against an ultra-republicanism. And such a counteractant is needed. For our republicanism is rapidly drifting at one extreme toward the communistic inter-

pretation of "all men are free and equal," and at the other toward a dangerous centralization. And these tendencies, antipodal as they are in theory, are practically playing into each other's hands. Radical thought expresses itself in radical action and reaction. The South is law-abiding and conservative. No part of this country is more devoted both in letter and in spirit to the constitution, and the unwritten law of conservatism, of sound citizenship, is as strong and sacred with us as the *lex non scripta* of England. In giving expression to this great and wholesome tendency of political thought, in embodying and preserving the invincible spirit of southern conservatism, we shall make no mean contribution to modern political literature, and do the Republic itself a service.

But besides this we have room and demand for other immediate and vigorous political thought. Important and pressing questions of government and of society await solution at our hands. Notable among these is the race question of white and black. What is to be the final result here? What the reciprocal action of the races? Can the negro be made a safe citizen, and, if he can, how? Gratuitous suggestions and ready made solutions pour in from foreign quarters where the problem is not understood. But we of the South, and we only, have the working out of the matter. It is our task alone to elevate the ignorant and helpless negro to the highest political and social plane within his capacity, and set his feet in the way of worthy ends. And the problem and our solution of it are not without great significance to this country and to the Science of Government. For the question of modern

politics is whether republicanism, toward which all the nations are drifting, be really the ultimatum of human government. Certainly our experiment in the South will have a voice in the answer. For if we, with the burden of an ignorant, irresponsible, unthinking majority, the prey of charlatanism, incorporated into our body politic, secure and maintain permanently the purity of republican institutions, the success of republicanism will be assured. No people can thereafter doubt the possibility of free government.

Some may think that these political problems hardly belong to the question of literature. But if, as has been truly said, the literature of republics is largely oratorical and political, the literature of the South has been and must continue to be peculiarly so.

For in the matter of building up political thought, we inherit peculiar capabilities, if not a popular genius, as in this particular field we inherit, also, a literature that is among the very best achievements in letters of our western world. Old Patrick Henry and Calhoun may be read in company with Demosthenes and Burke.

These, then, are the richer and more promising fields that are ours for literary cultivation, an heroic past and the fortunate temper of our thought toward the religious questions, and the political problems of the immediate future. But over and above these there is another direction in which we may look, not with certainty, indeed, but still with something of reasonable hope. Has all poetry been written, and if not, have we anything to expect in that way? Here in truth we come to a doubtful range of prediction, so delicately elusive, so exquisitely shy and surprising is

the Muse. We will not fall into the fallacy of a popular philosophy, and argue the necessity of the poet from the appropriate environment. But we may at least repeat the question that a great English student of poetry asked some years ago. Nearly every strong and peculiar people that has lived in a land where nature has been joyously bountiful and luxuriant has articulated its poetic interpretation of the great outdoor world, "and now," he asked, "why may we not hope for a phase of poetry of nature from the southern states of America?" And why not? Nature speaks the same speech to no two peoples, smiles alike on no two lands, and she has dealt bountifully with us. May not her special revelations to us, striking on our peculiar temperament, find a new and noble utterance? If the leaf of Henry Timrod's genius had not "perished in the green"—the pity of it—his pure, strong voice might now be answering this question amid the "immemorial pines" of his Carolina.

I confess to a lively faith in our literary future, if only we are true to ourselves as a people, and turn to account our inspirations and opportunities. But we must rouse ourselves to a sense of our literary needs, and enlist our best efforts in the development of our literary resources. I trust it would be a superfluous argument to accent the importance of such a development. We all know the high uses of literature, garnering, as it does, the only treasures of earth that moth and rust cannot corrupt, and furnishing, for the most part, the food on which, as individuals and as a people, we grow wiser and greater. It is at once cause and consequence of the noblest civilisation.

Who doubts that Goethe has done more to advance Germany in the rank of nations than Bismarck, that Tennyson has done more for the weal of England than any premier of his time? Fletcher of Saltoun's famous saying about making the songs of a people and letting who would make the laws, is founded on a deep truth of sociology. In the South we need a general revival of letters, an all-pervading intellectual awakening. Let the large earnestness and the productive energy of our people look beyond mere material progress to the things that endure. We want our railways built, our mineral resources developed, our lands improved, our cities populated, and all that. These things will make us richer, and we are not yet become effete through the enervating influence of excessive wealth. But if we would become wiser and stronger, if we would give scope to the souls of us, if we would fulfil the destiny of a great and virtuous people, we must look to a mental and spiritual commerce, to a development within, as well as without to work our will. There must be an intellectual demand which shall call forth its supplies from our own productive power. There must be a wider diffusion of culture, a wider appreciation of the "life which is more than meat." The popular mind must feel a concern about education, books, poetry, sculpture, all high art and thought. After reasonable food and raiment and a roof overhead, every family should have a library according to its ability. Men ought to see that a book may be worth more than a gold mine, a song more than an invention. We need better equipped schools, greater educational endowments, larger rewards for brain-

work, more publishing facilities, a better book trade, a larger, an hundred fold larger number of readers. For a literature requires readers as well as writers. We must support with our money, with our intelligent appreciation, and, whenever and wherever possible, with our own efforts whatever makes for a worthy literary development. After the war the question of bread and butter and of the liberty to earn and use it in peace was the practical, pressing issue, but that pressure is relaxed. The South is awake and at work, and is coming "up to the times" in industrial advancement quite as fast as is wholesome. The greatest need of our people now is of political economy, of mental science, of ethics, of history, of fiction, of poetry, of art—of a large and fruitful culture, not the adulterate eclecticism that is a modern counterfeit of it. We must make reading clubs and lyceums more popular with the young than the German. We must have a library wherever there is a corporate town. We must make our colleges the people's institutions. We must make our newspapers educative, vehicles of thought and information traveling everywhere in the public interest. We must beget a greater dignity of citizenship, a profounder sense of responsibility, both in individual and in community. We must get the ichor of a larger intellectual life at work in our veins, and learn to estimate spiritual values. We must possess ourselves of "the best that has been thought and said" by the wise and great of the ages. We must learn and speak with one another the language of the flowers, the birds, the stars. "Speak to the earth and it shall teach thee."

But let us remember, what we have already seen, that if we would come into lasting greatness as a people, especially if we would produce a worthy literature, the prime condition is that we "to our own selves be true." Our development must be indigenous, along the line of our national characteristics and race proclivities. We cannot import thought, we cannot copy a literature that will give us growth. We are a distinct people with problems of our own, of which we can neither borrow the solutions nor transfer the responsibility. We cannot build on an English, nor on a German, nor on any foreign foundation, but must lay our own deep in our national life. Out of our own soil we must derive our sustenance, out of our own souls proceed the everlasting things of life for us.

Our own thought must not be eclipsed by our culture, our methods of life must not be nullified by any imitation however ambitious.

Rich and ennobling indeed is the study of the heroic past of the Greeks, filled with demi-gods whose Titanic figures are cast in a matchless literature, but let us not forget that our own life rests on the background of a knightly chivalry. We may dwell with kindling aspiration on the saving truths uttered by ancient bard and prophet, but let us remember that we ourselves have a work to do for truth. The conditions of statecraft in ancient empires and republics may give us lofty study, but we ourselves have harder and higher political problems than Greek or Roman or Englishman. We muse how the waves of the many-sounding Aegæan symbolised for Sophocles man's infinite yearning and the restless flow of human life, but on our own shores break

waves as many-sounding and as suggestive as on sterile Attica. We read that the muses dwelt on Mount Olympus, but our own mountains shame Olympus and are as many-fountained as Ida. Sweet and fragrant to our fancy bloom the fields where Burns plowed and sang. Consider our own fields—what Scottish heath is arrayed like one of these?

Life with all its suggestiveness, with all its mystery and with all its primal power is in us and about us. And man is still great enough and the world still young and rich enough for us to win from its fair wide fields fresh supplies for our immortal needs.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 017 166 508 5